

Shared Governance: What does this mean, is it a reality?

by

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Academic Freedom and Tenure

The relationship of faculty governance to academic freedom has long standing in the AAUP. The AAUP was founded in 1915 and its Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure was also established that year. It created its Committee T on College and University Government the next year. “Two aspects of an institution’s academic practice have been of particular concern to the Association ever since: the rights and freedoms of individual faculty members and the role of the faculty in institutional governance.”¹ Thus from its very inception, AAUP has associated the academic freedom and tenure of faculty with faculty involvement in the governance of the institution.

Academic freedom and tenure are two most central tenets of AAUP. In their 1940 statement on academic freedom and tenure, they start with the following statement: “The purpose of this statement is to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to ensure them in colleges and universities.”² It goes on to say, “Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.” In another report, AAUP states: “A central dimension of academic freedom and tenure is the exercise of professional judgment in such matters as the selection of research projects, teaching methods and course curricula, and evaluations of student performance.”³

The fundamental principles describing the proper role of faculty in institutional governance were set forth in a 1966 statement that was formulated by the AAUP, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB).⁴ While nowhere in this statement is the term “shared governance” used, section II of this statement (page 218) is titled “**The Academic Institution: Joint Effort**” and clearly indicates the intent that the governance of the institution is a shared effort. Sections III, IV and V present the roles of the Governing Board, The President and The Faculty respectively. In this presentation, I will concentrate on the role of faculty in this “Joint Effort” or shared governance.

Section V of this statement (pages 221-222) is titled “**The Academic Institution: The Faculty**” and gives the fundamental role of the faculty. I will only excerpt several statements from this section stating the responsibilities seen as the responsibility of the faculty and the responsibility of the administration and governing board to the actions of the faculty. The following is taken directly from this section:

“The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. On these matters the power of

¹ “On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom,” AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, Ninth Edition, 2001, page 224

² “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments,” AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, Ninth Edition, 2001, page 3.

³ “Post Tenure Review: An AAUP Response,” AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, Ninth Edition, 2001, page 53.

⁴ “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities,” AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, Ninth Edition, 2001, pages 217-223.

review or final decision lodged in the governing board or delegated by it to the president should be exercised adversely only in exceptional circumstances, and for reasons communicated to the faculty.

“The faculty sets the requirements for the degrees offered in course, determines when the requirements have been met, and authorizes the president and board to grant the degrees thus achieved.

“Faculty status and related matters are primarily a faculty responsibility; this area includes appointments, reappointments, decisions not to reappoint, promotions, the granting of tenure, and dismissal. The primary responsibility of the faculty for such matters is based upon the fact that its judgment is central to general educational policy. The governing board and president should, on questions of faculty status, as in other matters where the faculty has primary responsibility, concur with the faculty judgment except in rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail.

“The faculty should actively participate in the determination of policies and procedures governing salary increases.

“Agencies for faculty participation in the government of the college or university should be established at each level where faculty responsibility is present.”

This is what is meant by the term “Shared Governance” and is the model used to form the “Handbook for Faculty” at many universities. At Wichita State University, the Handbook for Faculty was written by faculty, approved by the general faculty body, and approved by the administration. When the Faculty Senate was constituted in 1987, it was given the responsibility of oversight of compliance with the Handbook and the proposal of changes to the Handbook. Any changes to the Handbook would require approval of the Senate and in some cases of the General Faculty and the approval of the President. There has been a recent trend for governing boards and university administrations at many universities to move toward what is called the “industrial model” or the “consumer driven model” where students are considered consumers. Neither of these would be shared governance and are not the model given by AAUP or the Handbook for Faculty. This form of shared governance requires much work by the faculty and that makes some faculty uncomfortable. When I was a professor at WSU, I would often hear a faculty member say, “just let me do my research and teaching and let the administration do the governance.” That would be the industrial model. I was the third Faculty Senate President and was criticized by my colleagues for allocating too much of my time for senate work. However, being senate president is a lot of work. The senate president in a Regents’ university goes to all Kansas Board of Regents meetings. That is how we get faculty participation in all levels of governance.

At WSU, the Handbook for Faculty is not the same as the Policy and Procedures Manual even though many parts are the same wording. The Policy and Procedures Manual covers all the university including the classified staff, faculty, administration, and students. These are general policies that apply to all members of the university and any changes are initiated by the administration. These changes may, or may not, require approval of the faculty. The Handbook for Faculty is just that. It is a handbook outlining the duties, responsibilities and benefits of the faculty. Changes to this handbook are proposed by the faculty. Another important point related to this separation of intent was pointed out to me recently by a relatively new faculty member at

WSU. He stated that it is the Handbook for Faculty that is given to a new faculty member, not the Policy and Procedures Manual. While this may not sound significant, it indicates the importance placed in this handbook. When the two manuals are the same, they are cross-listed such as the Grievance Procedures. This important document is listed as **5.32/Handbook for Faculty** and **5.06/WSU Policies & Procedures**. This document is an important part of what is called shared governance. If a grievance of a faculty member, either against another faculty member or an administrator, is brought forward to the Senate Rules Committee and if this committee rules that it should be heard by a grievance hearing committee, a Convener, who is a faculty member, is determined and a grievance panel is selected composed of faculty members. This is part of what is meant by the previous quote from AAUP, "Faculty status and related matters are primarily a faculty responsibility." The grievance procedure goes on to say, "The Review Committee will make its recommendations to the vice president, who will decide to accept, reject, or modify those recommendations. The existence of the grievance procedure assumes that the faculty recommendations will generally be accepted and will be rejected or modified only for compelling reasons." This is a very strong statement and a very high standard. Not complying with this high standard indicates a lack of shared governance.

AAUP further states:

"There are at least three reasons why the faculty's voice should be authoritative across the entire range of decision making that bears, whether directly or indirectly, on its responsibilities. For each of these reasons it is also essential that faculty members have the academic freedom to express their professional opinions without fear of reprisal.

"In the first place, this allocation of authority is the most efficient means to the accomplishment of the institution's objectives.

"The second reason issues from the centrality of teaching and research within the array of tasks carried out by an academic institution: teaching and research are the very purpose of an academic institution and the reason why the public values and supports it.

"The third reason is the most important in the present context: allocation of authority to the faculty in the areas of its responsibility is a necessary condition for the protection of academic freedom within the institution."⁵

Thus, we again see how this **Joint Effort** or **Shared Governance** is integrally related to **Academic Freedom** within the university. Please note also that AAUP maintains that this is the most efficient means to the accomplishment of the university's objectives. It is not, however, the model most understood by the general public.

In closing, I want to thank the Kansas Conference for giving me this opportunity to address the conference on this important issue.

⁵ "On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom," AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, Ninth Edition, 2001, pages 225-226.